

Boston or Birmingham get their recommended vaccines as they are about the children of Baghdad and Basra.

That same Web site proudly notes that USAID has "improved the health of vulnerable populations in Iraq by increasing access to high quality, community-based primary healthcare." That is just what we are trying to do for vulnerable populations in America.

In Iraq, it is an accomplishment. In America, it is a veto.

A bipartisan majority in Congress has made a judgment, too. Our judgment is that we must make room for decent health care for America's children. We must stand up to the empty rhetoric and hollow slogans of the White House, and give all children in America the healthy start in life they deserve.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska is recognized.

IRAQ BENCHMARKS

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I rise today to try to bring the focus of the debate about Iraq back to Iraq, specifically the Iraqi Government's continuing failures to meet benchmarks for progress on political, military, and security matters.

For the past several weeks, the news out of Iraq has been consumed by coverage of the Blackwater security transgressions. To be sure, the allegations against Blackwater are serious and need to be addressed. Oversight needs to be tightened, actions should be taken to ensure that security needs are being met, and force is used only when necessary.

By no means do I believe we should do anything but hold Blackwater and its Government overseers responsible for their actions. But what is happening is the Iraqi Government has successfully shifted the focus of the debate from their failures in meeting benchmarks for progress to the Blackwater security matter.

We need to refocus. Everyone here remembers, and the American people remember, this past spring, during the debate on the supplemental, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, that during the deliberations on that debate, Congress codified into law 18 benchmarks that were identified by the Iraqi Government and the Bush administration.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I pushed to include benchmarks in this bill. Since returning from Iraq, having spent Thanksgiving there with the troops in Iraq, I began to call for the Iraqi Government and U.S. military leaders to establish a method of measuring progress on the stated goals of standing up the military and security forces and establish a functioning government.

During my third visit to our troops in Iraq, in April of this year, I deliv-

ered a strong message to Iraqi leaders that they needed to show progress on an oil agreement, quelling sectarian violence, and building a functioning government very quickly or the United States would continue to lose patience with the war.

This supplemental presented an opportunity to send that message and codify it into law. It was the hope of the Senate to provide measurable benchmarks that could provide an outline on progress in Iraq. As part of the benchmarks requirement, Congress asked the White House to provide an assessment in July and September. Congress also directed the GAO to provide its own assessment on the Iraqi benchmarks. In July, Congress received an assessment from the White House on the status of the 18 benchmarks. At that time the White House indicated that satisfactory progress on eight of the benchmarks had been made. On the remaining 10 benchmarks, the White House indicated that the Iraqi Government had failed to make satisfactory progress. In September, the GAO review indicated that 3 benchmarks had been met, 4 had been partially met, and 11 had not been met at all.

In September, the White House provided its final assessment of the 18 benchmarks. Of the benchmarks, satisfactory progress had been made on 10, 2 more than in July, and 8 benchmarks still received an unsatisfactory rating, 2 less than July.

Everyone remembers that this is an important issue because of the importance of making positive gains by the Iraqi Government. I visited Iraq for a fourth time in September, just after General Petraeus testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee but before the benchmark reports were issued. Little had changed. Iraq's political leaders were still entrenched. There was still very little hope for progress on the benchmarks. I delivered the message that time was running out on the blank check policy the administration seems to have implemented in Iraq. At this critical juncture of U.S. policy toward Iraq, the Iraqi policy toward the United States seems disjointed, disconnected, and disassociated. The level of progress on the benchmarks is debatable, but what is undeniable is the fact that progress is needed on some of the most urgent issues to bring peace and stability in Iraq.

The Iraqi Government has failed to enact a deBaathification law, a law on equitable distribution of hydrocarbon resources and revenues—that is essentially the oil and the revenues they have collected—and to provide three trained and ready brigades to support Baghdad operations and the disarmament of the militias. The level of progress is undebatable. The Iraqi Government has failed to deliver on these three important benchmarks. These are fundamental failures by a government that continues to expect the United States to invest in Iraq with

our soldiers and our dollars, and these failures are unacceptable. We cannot continue on this path and cycle of Iraqi dependence on the United States.

As we prepare to deal with another supplemental, bringing the total off-budget additional war spending this year to just under \$200 billion, making total off-budget spending on the war in Iraq nearly \$500 billion—off-budget spending in Iraq of nearly half a trillion dollars—we need to refocus on what is happening in Iraq. We need to reexamine these benchmarks and others. Those who called for another 6 months to allow more progress got what they wanted. The question is, when will we get what we want? When will Iraq step up and take over? When will we be able to bring most of our troops home? When will the cycle of dependence end?

The answers to these questions lie in the benchmarks we established. Progress on the benchmarks can give us a timeframe for the future. Lack of progress on the benchmarks could only extend our commitment indefinitely, if we allow it to continue.

Finally, we do need to focus on the Iraqi Government's progress on the benchmarks and the lack thereof. If they had made more rapid progress, we would not need private security outfits protecting American assets and personnel. If they continue to fail to make progress and meet the benchmarks, we will need to fundamentally reassess what our future role might be in Iraq. We can't sustain this pace forever. Our soldiers deserve better. Our taxpayers deserve better. The Iraqi people deserve better from their own Government than the failed leadership they have been shown to date.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. Has the Senate concluded morning business?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Not quite yet. The minority has a minute and a half; the majority has a minute and a half.

Who seeks recognition?

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

PASSENGER RAIL INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENT ACT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the